Soviet Theatre

YURI RYBAKOV

The Soviet Theatre

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Since olden times the theatre in Russia has aroused respect if not rapture. It has invariably been regarded as a sort of rostrum from which the good has been preached.

This Russian attitude toward the theatre was expressed well by the celebrated critic, Vissarion Belinsky, who wrote:

"Do you love the theatre as I love it, that is, with all the powers of your soul, with all the enthusiasm and the ecstasy of ardent youth, avid and yearning for impressions of fine things? Or, to put it better, can you not love the theatre more dearly than anything else in the world except the good and the true? Which of all the arts possesses so potent a means of amazing the soul with vivid impressions and of playing with it without limit?... Oh go, do go to the theatre, live and die in it, if you possibly can!"

Of course the old Russian theatre was riddled with bureaucratic routine, the commercial spirit and the squalor and poverty of the actor's life in the provinces. But the progressive, democratic art of the theatre, closely related to the great nineteenth-century traditions of literature—to the works of Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov—faithfully served the cause of enlightenment and the struggle against tsarist tyranny. The Russian theatre needed an invigorating reform. This made itself felt toward the clo-

se of the century. Above all, the theatre needed new conflicts and a new form, hence a new dramatic writer. Two such writers made their appearance. One was Anton Chekhov, a son of a milk trader of the southern Russian city of Taganrog, the other Maxim Gorky, who came from a large artisan family of Nizhny Novgorod, on the Volga.

Their plays are associated with a new period in the history of the Russian theatre, which began on the night of October 14, 1898, when the Moscow Art Theatre announced to its first audience: "I lay great hopes upon this cause." That opening phrase of Alexey K. Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor* proved prophetic.

But dramas alone could not reform the theatre. It was imperative to have masterly directors and actors who could live up to the demands of the time by finding a different scenic idiom for the drama, whether new or old.

The closing decade of the century gave Russia such people. They were Konstantin Alexeyev, who assumed the stage name of Stanislavsky—a factory owner and a well-known theatrical amateur, and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, a noted prose writer, dramatist, critic and educator.

On June 21, 1897, the two men met in the Moscow restaurant *Slaviansky Bazar* (Slavic Bazaar). An eighteen-hour talk brought out their common desire to found a new theatre in Moscow, as well as their common approach to the aesthetic nature of that theatre-to-be.

Nemirovich-Danchenko, in reminescing about that meeting, wrote:

"The conversation immediately gained an unusual heartiness. Mutual enthusiasm developed without further hesitation. The material of our discourse was vast. There was scarcely a spot in the old theatre that we did not attack with ruthless criticism. What a slaughter! We vied with each other in the supply of poisoned arrows. What was still more important, there was not a single spot in the whole complex theatrical organism for which we did not appear provided with a positive plan, whether by reform, reorganisation or complete revolution!"[1]

Named the Art and Popular Theatre, it opened on October 14, 1898, in the Moscow Public Garden Hermitage.

New art always rejects the old. To the founders of the Art Theatre the immediate target of rejection was the Moscow Maly Theatre. Stanislavsky had great respect for its traditions. He stressed that the Maly system rested on the testament of great Mikhail Shchepkin, who, in the middle of the century, introduced a new element into its realistic art. Stanislavsky thought highly of its social role and called it a second university. However, by the time the Art Theatre came into existence, the Maly Theatre's golden age had ended. It was presenting mostly second-rate plays and its acting abounded in clichés. Stanislavsky attacked the stage stereotype, which replaced life, unfeigned impulse by overacting.

Alexander Lensky, a leading actor of the

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[1] V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, *My Life in the Russian Theatre*. Boston, 1936, p. 83.

Maly Theatre company and the only stage director who realised the new tasks facing his profession, was also profoundly discontented with his theatre. His attempt at renovation was a partial success but fell short of thorough reform, for this implied a basically new organisation of the theatrical process, new ethical and aesthetic principles and young, plastic talents who would be ardent in breaking new ground. Such talents were found in students of the Philharmonic School who attended the class of Nemirovich-Danchenko and in theatrical amateurs who worked under Stanislavsky.

"The founding of our new Moscow Art and Popular Theatre was in the nature of a revolution. We protested against the customary manner of acting, against theatricality, against bathos, against declamation, against overacting, against the bad manner of production, against the habitual scenery, against the star system which spoiled the ensemble, against the light and farcical repertoire which was cultivated on the Russian stage at that time." [1]

Such was the programme of the budding company as Stanislavsky saw it.

Socially, the new theatre was based upon advanced democratic positions. "The Art Theatre is my civil service to Russia," stressed Stanislavsky.

Despite censorship difficulties and attacks from reactionary critics the company staged,

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[1] K. S. Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*. London, 1924, p. 330

along with works by Chekhov, revolutionary plays of the first proletarian writer, Maxim Gorky.

The Art Theatre opened a new phase in the history of the Russian theatre. The Stanislavsky theory—his well-known system— provided basic aesthetic principles for the Russian and Soviet theatres. The democratic traditions of the Art Theatre were given a new lease of life by the Socialist Revolution of 1917.

Toward October 25 (November 7, new style), 1917, the turning point in the history of Russia, the art of the theatre had degraded to a deplorable extent. The stock of old ideas was exhausted and the many schools of decadent art, which had gained ground in the early decades of the 20th century, failed to mirror the times despite all claims to novelty. The crisis of the theatre was sensed even by its great leaders. Stanislavsky confessed that he saw no way out of the deadlock before the revolution.

The Great October Socialist Revolution gave Russia a new social outlook and offered its honest theatre workers bright prospects for service to their people. Far from seeing theatre merely as a medium of entertainment, the new government believed it was a forceful vehicle for cultivating a spirit of revolutionary justice.

Some leading stage personalities took a long time and it was a great struggle to realize the major historic significance of the revolution. At first they could not align themselves with Soviet government and work honestly with it. The initial period was rife by friction and fraught with difficulty, though most members

of the theatrical profession sympathised with the idea of building a new Russia.

As early as November 9, 1917, the government of the revolution—the Council of People's Commissars—published a decree bringing the theatre under the State Education Commission.

During the first two years of Soviet rule state theatres coexisted with private, commercial ones. The private theatres could not dedicate themselves fully to public education. In 1919 the Decree to Unify Theatrical Enterprises made all theatres the property of the state. This decision laid down the organisational principles upon which the theatre would operate in the new Soviet republic. Its Article 9 read:

"The theatres regarded as useful and artistically professional are divided into several categories, all being subsidised by the state in the proportions that enable them to function with state-endorsed rates for labour and prices for seats.

This provision still applies to this day.

The new, revolutionary policy toward art was carried out largely due to the efforts of the first People's Commissar for Public Education. A passionate speaker and publicist, keen critic, inquisitive researcher and fine scholar of the history of art, Anatoly Lunacharsky was best equipped to implement the Leninist policy of the Communist Party in the field of education and art.

The revolutionary epoch could not help but produce extreme views on artistic advancement in the new Russia. Revolutionary ways had to be found. Renunciation allegations that the cul-

tural legacy of the past was completely bourgeois had to be overcome. Those who claimed they could create a new proletarian culture divorced from the old traditions had to be rebuffed. Vigorous protests against such claims came from Lenin.

The question of the attitude toward the cultural legacy of the past was broader than one of organisation or aesthetics. It was a burning political issue, involving the very essence and historical inevitability of the proletarian revolution, as a link in the evolution of civilisation.

Lenin was then giving much attention to this problem and resolutely opposed all attempts to destroy the old cultural legacy and build a new culture from scratch. In his sketch of a resolution on proletarian culture on October 9, 1920, Lenin wrote:

"*Instead of inventing a new proletculture we must develop the best examples, traditions, results of the existing culture, from the viewpoint of the Marxist world outlook and the conditions of life and struggle of the proletariat in the epoch of its dictatorship.*"

In his Draft Resolution on Proletarian Culture Lenin wrote:

"*Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture. Only further work on this basis and in this direction, inspired by the political experien-*

ce of the proletarian dictatorship as the final stage in the struggle against every form of exploitation, can be recognised as the development of a genuine proletarian culture."

(Incidentally, attention to these lucid statements would be good for some people in China, where cultural values are now being destroyed under the guise of a "cultural revolution." These Leninist provisions reveal, without mincing words, that those activities have nothing in common with Marxism).

In Lunacharsky Lenin found a like-minded person, a perfect organiser, a man who profoundly understood the importance of the cultural inheritance of the past for the future progress of art.

The cultural struggles went on against the extremely difficult background of the Civil War, with its devastation and hunger. Even supplying fuel to the Bolshoi Theatre became an issue that had to be examined by the Council of People's Commissars.

The old theatres, with their eminent masters of stagecraft and excellent traditions, survived in the teeth of monstrous hardships, due to concern on the part of the revolutionary government. Performances did not stop either at the Bolshoi, Maly and Art Theatres in Moscow or at the Alexandrinsky, Mariinsky and Mikhailovsky Theatres in Petrograd.

Early Soviet Stage Productions

The revolution stimulated the initiative of theatre workers who had openly and unhesitat-

ingly befriended the proletarian government. Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote the first Soviet play, his famous *Mystery-Bouffe,* while the first lyrical poet of pre-revolutionary Russia, Alexander Blok, together with Maxim Gorky, organised the Bolshoi Drama Theatre. The founders conceived this as a theatre with a heroic, socially expressive repertoire, one, as Blok said, "of great tears and great laughter."

The Art Theatre looked for consonance with the revolution in Byron's *Cain* while the Maly Theatre turned to plays by Lunacharsky. Just as two decades before, the Russian theatre awaited renascence, searching for fresh media of expression, and hoping for basically new plays. Early experiments of new Soviet theatrical art were already a success. Rehearsed quickly, energetically and filled with the immediacy of events, many early Soviet stage productions became classics of revolutionary art.

On November 7, 1918, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Vsevolod Meyerhold staged in Petrograd *Mystery-Bouffe,* the pioneer work about the revolution. Imbued with journalistic vehemence, the play incorporated elements of street pageantry and satirised enemies of the revolution.

Already in 1921, in the First Theatre of the RSFSR in Moscow, Meyerhold revived *Mystery-Bouffe* in his own new version which caused a sensation and a great deal of debate, just as had every production by Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, Tairov or Vakhtangov. These were turbulent times. Life was seething, so the urge to argue was almost a compulsive one.

These arguments revealed underlying truth

of the new art. Critical battles in the press, debates and public trials of literary heroes were constant, though the time hardly seemed suitable for this, with an acute shortage of food, fuel and so on caused by the Civil War.

In the cold hall of a little studio in a quiet Moscow by-street, with his winter coat on, swallowing pill after pill to relieve pains in his stomach, a man with a gaunt, sharp-featured face was rehearsing an old fairy-tale. He died several days after it was produced. The fairy-tale has been revived and is beating all records of theatrical run. It was a version of Carlo Gozzi's *Turandot,* and its director was Yevgeny Vakhtangov. The staging was enigmatic like so many of the reasons for stage success. The time seemed unfitting for jests in cold, dark Moscow, but that theatrical masquerade, full of scintillating humour, was a crazy hit. Success seldom comes undisputed—but that was exactly the case. The performance appealed to people who knew little about art and to people like Stanislavsky.

Vakhtangov who after the dress rehearsal could not rise from his bed did not hear the applause of the first night. It was a buoyant, festive show, with a resilient pulse and an assertion of human concepts such as love, friendship and devotion. It was an expression of revolutionary optimism, which kept people's spirits soaring despite all hardships and privations. *Turandot* was a success based on principle and it made theatrical history. To make this clearer I shall have to go into technical matters. First, a few hints about the Stanislavsky system.

Ever since he appeared on the amateur stage Stanislavsky had been thinking about the ratiocination behind acting in the theatre. He believed that in acting out a life-like picture of a character the player obeyed certain objective laws. Stanislavsky strove to lay bare the operation of the creative process, challenging what had previously been regarded as unknowable mystery of intuition and inspiration. In creating the Art Theatre he sought for a new measure of scenic truth. He aimed to grasp laws that might generate in the actor a constant readiness for creation, that would help him to understand his role deeply and portray it in a life-like manner.

Above all else in the actor Stanislavsky valued authenticity of emotion. At rehearsals he tried different methods, set up many studios to test and elaborate on his assumptions. His whole life was one constant experiment. He renounced some principles and techniques while advancing others, which he developed as profoundly as he knew how. Thus arose what is known as the Stanislavsky system, a code of acting laws based upon the principle of impersonation. The method could be summarised as "the actor's transformation into a character through emotion." Stanislavsky was anything but a bookworm, a man of dry theories. Paraphrasing Pushkin, Leonid Leonidov, a leading actor of the Art Theatre aptly observed: "What luck it was for us, actors, that Mozart and not Salieri decided to test harmony by algebra." No serious school of acting today can by-pass the objective laws of creation discovered by Stanislavsky.

Vakhtangov was one of Stanislavsky's most

dedicated and consistent disciples. He developed some provisions of his teacher's system and creatively applied his tenets. Vakhtangov dispelled the rather common view that Stanislavsky's system was limited and was good only for plays like Chekhov's. In that lies the basic meaning of his work on *Turandot*. Even people who were sympathetic to Stanislavsky did not imagine that his system could be applied to unlife-like works, nor that it could work in the theatre of the unconventional.

He proved effectively that it could work and work quite well. While maintaining the full range and pitch of sincere emotion the performers of *Turandot* freely overstepped the bounds of the characters and played with substitute objects. Personages with and without masks fitted in very well in the play. The director deliberately disclosed his operations in full sight of the audience: the actors put on costumes, made humorous use of properties, turned mufflers into beards and towels into Oriental turbans, while the orchestra played on haircombs. The additional interplay of masks was acutely topical.

Turandot graphically disproved that the Stanislavsky method, with its emphasis on verisimilitude, prevented the actor from mastering the grotesque, tragedy and farce. This remains common contention to this day. However, lifelikeness, as Stanislavsky understood it, was not at all identical with photographic portrayal of reality. It depends on the inner substantiation of this or that theatrical principle. The form of expression used allows for any shift of emphasis. "Nothing is too much on the stage if it conforms with inner logic," the fathers of the

Art Theatre would repeat, each in his own way. Stanislavsky reaffirmed this by staging Ostrovsky's *Warm Heart* in January 1926.

The production drew added importance from many other notable developments on the Soviet theatrical scene.

In 1923, when the Soviet Union marked the centenary of the birth of Alexander Ostrovsky, the great Russian dramatist, Lunacharsky advocated what many thought to be a paradoxical slogan: Back to Ostrovsky! Its meaning was the advocacy of realism in Russian drama.

Many works by Ostrovsky were staged in those years. In 1923, Meyerhold produced *Lucrative Job* and a year later *The Woods,* which triggered a flood of literary polemic. In the same year 1923 Sergei Eisenstein, later the great film director of *The Battleship Potyomkin,* staged at the Moscow Workers' Theatre a play entitled *Wise Man,* a version of Ostrovsky's *There's Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man.* Most stage directors except Stanislavsky assumed that Ostrovsky was no longer of much interest and had to be greatly modernised. Eisenstein presented a burning political review with one of Ostrovsky's subjects treated as a parody. In *The Woods* Meyerhold broke the text into episodes, as if cinematically, and combined them as he saw fit. The characters were parodied and their features sharply accentuated, though this conflicted with the style of Ostrovsky.

In this atmosphere of polemic Ostrovsky's *Warm Heart,* as staged by Stanislavsky, was in the nature of a manifesto. Without changing anything in the play he realistically disclosed

its social basis and the originality of the characters. The production combined grotesquerie and lyricism in a single passionate crucible. It abundantly revealed the strength and viability of the Art Theatre and of its method, the potentialities of which were then being widely called into question. That long-drawn-out polemic ended in favour of Stanislavsky; his theatre is still showing *Warm Heart.*

The extensive experimentation and heated debates steeled the forces of the new, revolutionary theatre, those capable of coping with highly challenging tasks. The epoch developed a group of good writers who could present on a high literary level conflicts inherent in the new reality. The task was to pass from poster-like straightforwardness and generalised allegory, as in the *Mystery-Bouffe,* to aesthetic investigation of the revolution and socialist construction. The performances of the seasons that followed showed that Soviet dramatists and theatrical companies were ripe for this mission.

The year 1925 was a turning point. History-making productions were staged one after another.

In October 1925, the Vakhtangov Studio dramatised *Virineya* by the young writer, Lydia Seifullina. It was produced by a young stage director, Alexei Popov. In two or three months another sensation shook the Moscow scene. The Mossoviet (the Moscow City Council) Theatre produced *The Storm* by Vladimir Bil-Belotserkovsky. In 1926 Maly presented *Lyubov Yarovaya,* by Konstantin Trenyov and later that year the

Art Theatre premiered Mikhail Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins*. All this caused another wave of polemic. The argument was bitter and uncompromising. The critics were searching for ways to get at the theatrical truth about the revolution.

All the above-mentioned productions, plus Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train 14—69* and Boris Lavrenyov's *Break-up*, staged at the Art Theatre in 1927, occupy places of honour in the history of the theatre. They left lasting impressions on thousands of spectators and paved the way to a new drama. Its basically democratic nature was manifested in the playwrights' close interest in ordinary people, their needs, struggles and maturing revolutionary spirit. The dramatic conflict in these early plays arose from the revolutionary struggle, which brought forth the hidden powers of human souls. Indeed, ordinary people became heroes when they accepted the truth of the revolution and rose to defend it.

Other plays dealing with current events tried to explain, through the idiom of characters, the miracle of the revolution which had emerged victorious from the trials of the Civil War and foreign intervention. The images of the peasant woman Virineya, of sailor Bratishka (Little Brother), of communists—chairman of a district committee (in *The Storm*) and Peklevanov (in *Armoured Train)*—largely laid the cornerstones for character portrayal in our drama and theatre.

These plays disclosed the greatness of our truly popular revolution and did so with tremendous artistic power. On the stage they asserted realistic principles—the truth of life in

literature imperatively called for such truth on the stage.

The period of search and experiment came to an end. It had enriched the language of the theatre and helped sift precious finds from mere novelties. The chief creative methods gained a foothold in the course of further development.

Critics and philosophers began to search for a formula of what was practically asserting itself as the single ideological and philosophical method. Later it was referred to as the method of socialist realism. It is frequently assumed that uniformity of the artistic method is achieved by a single language of art. This is erroneous theoretically and practically. The method as a theory offers the artist complete freedom to choose his subject, style and genre. In practice the Soviet theatre has achieved perhaps the greatest diversity of artistic individualism as well as gave rise to several schools and trends which have appreciably influenced the European theatre. That is our pride.

Significantly enough, the three theatres which won gold medals at the Paris exhibition of 1925 were the Art Theatre, the Meyerhold and the Kamerny. These represented three different schools and tendencies.

The Communist Party of the USSR, the ideological guide of art in the country, in a well-known 1925 Resolution about the Policy of the Party in the Sphere of Letters, formulated its attitude toward the various trends in art thus: "*While unmistakably feeling the social and class content of literary trends, the Party as a whole can by no means adhere blindly to any*

one tendency in the realm of literary form... The Party must stimulate free competition of different groupings and currents in this field."

By that time the theatre had developed several creative tendencies. The Moscow Art Theatre, the Maly, the Meyerhold, the Vakhtangov and the Kamerny Theatres each represented its own line. The founder of the Kamerny was the outstanding stage director Alexander Tairov. In 1925 the Art Theatre premiered Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins*, which caused an acute controversy. It was a dramatisation of *White Guard*, a sensational novel by the same author about the Civil War in the Ukraine. For the Art Theatre *Days of the Turbins* was of crucial importance as the first contemporary drama that fully met its artistic requirements and was concerned with current events. Besides, this play brought a new generation of actors to the Art Theatre.

The acting nucleus which had founded the Art Theatre had by then been working with the company for a quarter of a century. The troupe urgently needed young talent. The Art Theatre had always had many studios for training youth. Its actors often conducted classes in schools or their own studios. The most mature studios at the time of the revolution were three, numbered First, Second and Third.

The First Studio planned to develop into an independent theatre and refused to merge with the Art Theatre. What the older generation of the Theatre then regarded as the self-reliance of the young in fact was a realistic appraisal of ability.

The First Studio made up a curious company which was named Art Theatre II. Its star was the great actor Mikhail Chekhov, a man of fantastic gifts and accomplishments. His tragic mistake, emigration in 1928, cost him the heaviest price for an actor; it practically ended his acting career.

The Third Studio, led by Vakhtangov, after losing its leader, lived through a period of ferment till it became what is now the Vakhtangov Theatre.

The Second Studio accepted an invitation, as a body, to join the Art Theatre company. *Days of the Turbins* was their test and they passed it with merit. Many of them made excellent actors in the best tradition of the Art Theatre. Artistically, the production was an undisputed success but it sparked what was perhaps the most dramatic controversy of the time which was a time of raging theatrical debate.

Many looked upon *Days of the Turbins* as an apologia for the White Guards, and attacked it with fury, which was understandable since it came just after the Civil War. Some maintained it was alien, venomous, hostile and insulting and called the Art Theatre blue-blooded and other names. Some alleged that the theatre sympathised with the White Guards. Certain writers' organisations started what were called public "trials." The opponents had their own way and the performance was suspended until Stalin's intervention in three years. Stalin was against some of Bulgakov's plays but accepted *Days of the Turbins,* indicating, in a letter to V. Bil-Belotserkovsky, that it demonstrated

the crushing power of bolshevism. Obviously, the performance interested him, for he saw it at least fifteen times.

The *Days of the Turbins* is still in repertoire. The play which gave the Art Theatre so many happy and bitter days has been revived, and everyone agrees that Bulgakov's plays are a legitimate pride and an outstanding accomplishment of Soviet drama.

Another success of the Art Theatre was *Armoured Train 14—69,* by Vsevolod Ivanov.

To mark the 10th birthday of the October Revolution it was decided to stage a sequence of scenes by several playwrights, who were asked to contribute their effort. However, the directors did not relish the idea and must have been displeased with the texts of all the scenes except that by Ivanov, who had presented a version of his *Partisan Story* about Civil War guerillas of the Far East. They suggested that Ivanov write a whole play, which he did.

It was polygonal drama about the revolution and the people, about the inglorious end of those who failed to understand and fought against their own nation, and the cast played it most fittingly.

Armoured Train ended the allegations that the Art Theatre rejected the socialist revolution. "We strove for more than a long-range view of how people walk about carrying red flags," wrote Stanislavsky. "We wanted to look into the revolutionary soul of the nation." Lunacharsky regarded the production as a triumph.

This period was also the heyday of the

Meyerhold Theatre. Its *Inspector-General,* with mighty generalisations, splendid mastery and fantasy of direction was a resounding hit. Meyerhold strove to put into the production "the whole" of Gogol, with his bitter satire, profound lyricism and phantasmagoria. That was in 1926.

In two years the Theatre gave a new interpretation to *Wit Works Woe,* a comedy of Alexander Griboyedov, a contemporary of Pushkin. Meyerhold named it *Woe to Wit,* using a version discarded by Griboyedov.

Later in 1928 Mayakovsky offered Meyerhold his satire *The Bedbug.* The great poet unsparingly hit out at vicious philistines who were seeking to adapt themselves to the new situation. The play carried on splendidly the satirical line of Soviet drama, which had gained ground in *The End of Krivorylsk* and *Airy Pie* by Boris Romashov, *The Mandate* by Nikolai Erdman and *Embezzlers* by Valentin Katayev.

Meyerhold's production, bright, perky and lashing, was a great success. Mayakovsky was pleased and soon wrote another play, with a wider satirical range. Staged in 1930, *The Bathhouse* revealed higher technical maturity than *The Bedbug. The Bathhouse* attacked bureaucracy, a great enemy of socialist construction.

The public had expected another effective production from the two illustrious talents but *The Bathhouse* was a failure. It was at that time attributed to adverse theatrical circumstances. Viewed from the vantage ground of today, the failure can only be assessed as the first symptom of what was an impending crisis in the art of Meyerhold. He made another bid for success in

The Last Decisive, by Vsevolod Vishnevsky, which amazed audiences with its intensity and the uplift of a revolutionary tragedy. He was again at his best in the graceful *Thirty-Three Fainting Fits,* based upon humorous stories by Chekhov, and he demonstrated excellent direction with *La Dame aux Camélias,* by Dumas fils. But none of these productions provoked much enthusiasm or debate. Toward the middle 30s his theatre found itself in a difficult situation. Its popularity dropped disastrously and it was closed down in 1937.

The crisis of the outstanding master, whose work was vital to the Soviet and European theatre, had many sources—personal, creative and philosophic. One thing is clear. Meyerhold could not apply his fundamentally poetic talent to the theatre which reflected with veracity the period of construction of the revolution. That mission was performed by new drama, which sprang from the journalist essay and the press report. It was redolent of the earth and the factory and caught the throbbing pulse of the day and the inspired endeavour of the nation's early five-year-plan periods.

The agrarian, backward and monstrously devastated country was erecting giant plants and sinking huge mines, starting almost from scratch. In an atmosphere of sharply exacerbated class struggle the nation was building collective farms. Art could not ignore the pace and problems of the changing pattern of life, with its new atmosphere and heroes. A new generation of dramatists, with a different approach to reality, was entering the scene, alongside new stage directors ca-

pable of sensing and conveying the inspiration of that new drama.

At the head of the list are dramatist Nikolai Pogodin and stage director Alexei Popov. Once a roving correspondent for *Pravda*, Pogodin started his play-writing career with *The Tempo*. He knew day-to-day realities more thoroughly than fine points of theatrical writing. His plays were like essays—markedly faithful to fact and undiluted by invention. Academically, he could be rebuked for inelaborateness of composition. But he could not be criticised for falsity or scanty knowledge of life. With his keen sense of the authentic, Popov immediately felt that quality in Pogodin's play and accepted it for the Vakhtangov Theatre, which he directed. But just then he left this theatre, so *The Tempo* was produced by others. It was a play about the early stages of construction of a large plant. The builders felt it was an undertaking for their own and the common benefit. Their enthusiasm showed a new, socialist attitude to labour.

With the Theatre of the Revolution company Popov staged *Poem About the Axe*, the next play of Pogodin, also based on reality. A steelworker at a Ural plant discovered the secret of making stainless steel. Composition and character delineation were an improvement on his previous play—the result of accumulated experience. The acting was excellent. Dmitry Orlov as Stepanov and Maria Babanova as Anka gave epoch-making impersonations of characters moulded by socialist construction.

The performance had a journalistic, even a documentary nature. A character in the closing

scene went into the auditorium and triumphantly showed plates of stainless steel straight from the plant.

The next joint production of Pogodin and Popov in the Theatre of the Revolution was *My Friend.* This also dealt with industrialisation, which was then occupying the minds of both management and men of letters. Far from confining himself to praising the construction of new industries, Pogodin stressed beneficial changes in human psychology. Industrialisation, the play stated, was changing the appearance of the country. It was the work of the entire population and above all of the Communist Party, which was converting the nation from a backward, agrarian land into one with advanced machine production.

Industrialisation was generating a new attitude toward labour. That was an involved dialectical, in fact a revolutionary, process. Naturally, it attracted writers, and not least playwrights.

In the autumn of 1931, at his home in Malaya Nikitskaya Street, Gorky read to actors of the Vakhtangov Theatre his new play, *Yegor Bulychov and Others,* of which Nemirovich-Danchenko said: "*Such a play, such a fearless attitude toward the past, and such boldness in telling the truth, reveal victory, a complete, irreversible victory of the revolution, better than hundreds of posters and demonstrations.*"

Staged a year later, the play was a milestone in Soviet theatrical history. The director was Boris Zakhava, a disciple of Vakhtangov. The part of the dying old merchant, Yegor Bulychov,

was played by Boris Shchukin already a noted actor. The setting was a small provincial town just before the revolution. A presentiment of impending death made the merchant take a close look at life, soberly assess the events, rise above the prejudices and preconceptions of his class and realise its historical doom. Yegor understood that he had lived his life "on the wrong street."

The Soviet critic, Pavel Markov, wrote "*Shchukin's Bulychov associates his coming death with that of his class, but the dying merchant goes beyond the psychology of his class. He regrets the past and vaguely guesses that, new forces will replace those of 'bygone days.' In Bulychov's mischief, love of paradox and sharpness of judgment Shchukin accentuated his mockery of his environment and the alarmed, impatient expectancy of the still dim future.*"

The Gorky drama gained a new lease of scenic life. Shortly the Art Theatre staged *Enemies,* one of its best productions of the time, with magnificent acting by Vasily Kachalov, Nikolai Khmelyov and Alla Tarasova. It was a penetrating picture of life in Russia before the first organised action of the Russian proletariat in 1905. At the same time the Leninsky Komsomol Theatre staged *Dostigayev and Others, The Petty Bourgeois, Old Man* and a new version of *Vassa Zheleznova.* Close interest in the Gorky drama lasted nearly ten years and culminated, in 1941, in *The Barbarians,* one of the most tragically profound presentations on the Soviet stage. It was the work of Ilya Sudakov at the Maly Theatre.

Dramas by Gorky were a catalyst in shaping

new qualities in the theatre and supporting the underlying principles of socialist realism.

The period between 1931 and 1941 was marked by the emergence of a whole galaxy of dramatists and stage directors. One of the bold innovators was dramatist Vsevolod Vishnevsky. A machine-gunner with fighting experience on almost all the fronts of the Civil War, he brought into the drama and theatre new characters, the seething passions of life and the energy of revolutionary action. Vishnevsky was active in the theatrical debates of the time. His stocky figure could often be seen on rostrum. An eloquent speaker, he communicated his fervour to others. During World War II he stayed in nazi-besieged Leningrad, frequently adressing soldiers and speaking on the radio. His speeches have a literary interest and make stirring reading.

Vishnevsky's debut was with the *First Cavalry Army*. The newness of material, the style of the play and the popularity of its characters appealed to the Theatre of the Revolution, which was then given to search and experiment. It was produced by Alexei Diky, a most original director, who shortly before that had hit the headlines with *The Flea,* after Leskov, in Art Theatre II.

Vishnevsky's next play, *The Last Decisive,* was one of the final achievements of Meyerhold. The description of its finale may be found in every text on theatrical history. The fatally-wounded hero, a Red Army man, gathers his last strength to rise on his elbow and chalk on the blackboard (his group had fought a battle

in a school) the figures 126,000,000—26, detracting from the population of his country the number of his fellow-soldiers just killed. Vishnevsky reached the acme of popularity with *The Optimistic Tragedy.* Tairov produced it at the Kamerny in 1933.

At that time Tairov was an accomplished director with a reputation for handling theatrical matter exquisitely. It seemed inconceivable that a man who had staged *The Coverlet of Pierrette, Phèdre, Girofflee-Giroffla* and *Adrienne Lecouvreur* could feel the romance and harshness of the atmosphere of a play about the revolution. Likewise, it seemed inconceivable that the star of the Kamerny Theatre, Tairov's wife, Alisa Koonen, could impersonate a woman Commissar, a Communist, who acted boldly and resolutely in the dangerous situation of an anarchist camp. However, its success surpassed all expectations. The revolutionary drama was a tribute to the talent of Tairov, while Koonen built up her reputation as an outstanding tragédienne. The Kamerny production about a fearless Bolshevik pinpointed the all-conquering truth of the revolution: the hero died but the revolution was victorious.

More contributions to Soviet drama came from Leonid Leonov, Alexander Korneichuk, Alexander Afinogenov, Alexei Arbuzov and Vasily Shkvarkin.

A lengthy and bitter controversy now flared up, the kind that occurs when the arts are affected by strong personalities with varying artistic outlooks, each contributing new elements when a new society is in the making. Debates

are inescapable in such a situation. One section of playwrights and stage directors insisted that in a period of revolutionary reconstruction the theatre was not supposed to concern itself with the individual, but only with masses. There must be no "private roofs" on the stage, they maintained. The other section maintained that by changing social and political reality the revolution was changing men's souls. Hence the individual could and must come into literary and theatrical range. Again the debaters went to extremes, but subsequent theatrical practice found the proper place for everything: the monumental *The Optimistic Tragedy* by Vsevolod Vishnevsky and a chamber-like psychological play, *Mashenka* by his opponent Afinogenov, were both successes. Pogodin, himself an ardent debater, wrote panoramic plays about the revolution, such as *Kremlin Chimes* and *The Third, Pathétique* as well as a drama about love at an advanced age, *Petrarchan Sonnet.*

By the time of the First Congress of Soviet Writers, which, in 1934, united individual literary groups and associations, literature and art had passed the stage of rule-of-thumb searching. The nation as a whole and its writers, in particular, had accumulated certain experience which ruled out the mistakes of the past and made it possible to look into the future. The method of socialist realism gained a firm foothold as the only method of art. That was by no means a speculative conception, divorced from life. The method incorporated the common elements which identified the ideological and aesthetic features of literature and art. Soviet writers and artists

created works about the life of their nation and the practices of socialist construction, works imbued with the added optimism and humanitarianism of their own social experience. By that time art had graphically revealed its manifold aesthetic nature and abundance of talent, schools and trends, for the method of socialist realism offers full freedom to choose the subject, genre, style and form.

Those years were rich in outstanding productions of classics.

A keen interest in the best in literature has always been characteristic of the Art Theatre. It had experience in staging dramatisations of prose. Before the revolution the theatre produced successfully *The Power of Darkness* and *The Living Corpse*. The staging of *Resurrection* testified to its continued interest in Tolstoy.

Resurrection was produced by Nemirovich-Danchenko. An actor recited parts of the novel—a new element in the practice of the Art Theatre. The lengthy pieces afforded the audiences a better grasp of the atmosphere and action. The reciter's role became one of the best in the work of Vasily Kachalov, the great actor and idol of the Moscow public for four decades.

Two years later, in 1932, Stanislavsky staged *Dead Souls*, a Russian nineteenth-century classic by Gogol. Both productions have been running to this day.

The second half of the 30s was equally rich in the production of classics. Familiar since school years, the Russian and West European plays and dramatisations, coming one after

another, gratified audiences with their artistic value and novelty of interpretation, direction and acting.

In 1933 Meyerhold produced *La Dame aux Camélias*. He raised a one-role melodrama to a level of tragedy. He conceived the play as an indictment of a society in which people find it difficult to reach understanding and the lie is the essence of human relations. However, the production fell short of complete success; Meyerhold's decline was becoming evident.

In 1935 energetic Alexei Popov produced *Romeo and Juliet* in the Theatre of the Revolution. His work amounted to a re-reading of Shakespeare and stimulated an ever-growing interest in the work of the great playwright.

Without modernising or shifting the setting Popov retained the historical background and faithfully conveyed the meaning of the tragedy from a contemporary viewpoint. The characters were portrayed with strong contemporary undercurrent. The director elaborated on the background of the young lovers' tragedy and explained their case historically. The tragedy, as Popov saw it, sprang from internecine and fratricidal dissensions. By diving from a tall staircase into the thick of the fight the young man, handsome and wearing a blue cloak, set the tone for the rest of the tragedy from the very beginning.

The lofty humanitarianism of Shakespeare's tragedies was then presented with amazing power by two great actors. In the Maly Theatre Othello was played by Alexander Ostuzhev, an actor brought up in the tradition of that theatre, with

a surprising plasticity of movement and a beautiful voice. With consummate skill he interpreted the character as the great Pushkin had suggested in his day: "Othello is not jealous. On the contrary, he is credulous." Ostuzhev acted out a tragedy of deceived trust. The other interpreter of Shakespeare was the chief director of the Jewish Theatre, Solomon Mikhoels, who staged *King Lear* and played the title role. Mikhoels was an outstanding success as Lear even though the performances were in Yiddish.

Every Soviet theatre staged Shakespeare in those years. In Moscow history was made by the splendid, buoyant production of *Much Ado about Nothing* at the Vakhtangov Theatre, *The Taming of the Shrew,* with its Renaissance-like breadth of feeling, staged by Popov in the Soviet Army Theatre, and the seldom-seen *Love's Labours Lost,* directed by Nikolai Khmelyov of the Art Theatre in the studio which later became the Yermolova Theatre.

Theatrical companies took an intense interest in a wide range of Russian and foreign classics. Among the hundreds of productions several have become signposts in Soviet theatrical history for their novelty of interpretation and high level of artistry.

At the top of the list are *Anna Karenina,* after Leo Tolstoy, and *Three Sisters,* by Chekhov, staged by Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theatre and *Madame Bovary,* after Gustave Flaubert, directed by Tairov at the Kamerny Theatre.

Anna Karenina and *Madame Bovary* were valuable additions to the magnificent collection

of Soviet dramatisations. Alla Tarasova as Anna and Alisa Koonen as Emma added to their reputations and were great successes for many seasons. The subtlety of the interpretations of the two actresses was in the best traditions of Russian acting. It was natural and customary of the Art Theatre while for the Kamerny, known for whimsical scenic forms, the staging of *Madame Bovary* was of crucial importance. Like *The Optimistic Tragedy,* it built up its standing as a realistic company.

Three Sisters, perhaps the most profound of Chekhov's plays, merits special comment. Premiered on January 31, 1901, following *The Seagull* and *Tsar Fyodor,* it was another major success and consolidated the position of the Art Theatre.

With the interest in Chekhov's plays on the wane in the 20s and early 30s *Three Sisters* went off the boards. It took some time before Chekhov's drama could reveal its wealth of meaning and irresistible appeal under the new social conditions. A correct understanding of Chekhov's work was to a certain extent hampered by a section of critical opinion, which followed in the footsteps of pre-revolutionary literary scholars who claimed that Chekhov had been a bard of "the dusk," a pessimist and a whiner.

Without question, it was impossible to present Chekhov in 1940 as had been done in 1901. A new approach was needed to bridge the gap between Chekhov of that time and today. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko strove all these years for a basically new approach toward

Chekhov. And they found it. This is how Stanislavsky visualised a new interpretation of *The Cherry Orchard: "Give Lopakhin in The Cherry Orchard the sweep of Shalyapin and young Anya the temperament of Yermolova, let the former lash all the outdated with all his vigour and the young girl who, just as Petya Trofimov, feels a new epoch forthcoming, shout for the entire world to hear: 'Welcome new life!' you will realize that The Cherry Orchard is very near to us, that it is a modern play. You will hear a young, impassioned voice, for Chekhov looks not backward but forward."*

The statement held good for *Three Sisters* too. This play was the rage of the season in 1940 and a fundamental re-reading of Chekhov. Above all, the director revealed a courageous attitude toward the reality he resuscitated. The passage of time and the basic changes which had taken place in the nation pushed into the background the plain, everyday aspect of the drama, which was enough for the audiences of the first year of its run, those who saw their own images in *Three Sisters.* Nemirovich-Danchenko had to take these changes into account and discover the timeless element in the play. That was Chekhov's ability to poeticise, not only people's sufferings, but also their will to overcome obstacles, their lofty spirit and delicate but inflexible humaneness. Theatrically, the production was characterised by impeccable life-likeness and charming poetry. Without exaggeration, nothing impressed the 1940 audiences more deeply than *Three Sisters,* though its re-creator was 80 years old.

The last pre-war premiere of the Art Theatre was *The School for Scandal,* by Sheridan, an exquisite production of the eminent director and theatrical instructor, Nikolai Gorchakov, author of *Stanislavsky's Lessons in Stage Direction.* It was followed by *Kremlin Chimes,* by Pogodin, premiered already during World War II.

The war brought abundant proof that Soviet theatres mirrored the life of the nation. In peace time the theatres contributed to socialist construction. In war time their actors and directors put on uniforms and joined the ranks of the fighters. Thousands of troupes performed for the army, both in the tragic days of retreat and in the days of military gains, travelling from the Volga to Berlin. Their stages were dugouts, trucks or just meadows. Soviet art fought together with its people, instilling in them hatred of the enemy and arousing patriotism. Many performances and concerts were staged at the frontlines, many actors were soldiers, marble plaques in theatres bear the names of those who, regarding their art as a weapon in the hour of war, went to the front never to return.

Many companies were evacuated eastwards, from nazi-occupied cities, where they carried on their activities till they returned to their native cities after liberation. The war never held up the activities of the theatre.

Intensive work was done by Soviet playwrights, to whom life offered an abundance of heroic material and themes full of untold dramatism. In the summer of 1942 *Pravda* published something it had never printed before—a plav. It was *The Front,* by Alexander Kornei-

chuk. To its readers the very publication of a play in *Pravda* signified that it dealt with vital issues of the day. It was about conflicting styles of leadership and the need for a new approach toward military problems, the need for a change in attitude to the essence of the command. One style was represented by old General Gorlov, a hero of the Civil War, an honest man who failed to realize that the new war—technically, strategically and psychologically—was different from that with which he had made his fame. Young General Ognev, proponent of a new approach, opposed the old methods and prevailed in the tough dispute.

The play focussed some vital features of the contemporary military situation, indicated causes of the setbacks sustained during the early months of the war and convincingly heralded victory. Naturally, the play attracted many theatres and had good runs.

The Front bore the obvious influence of journalism, posing and solving problems directly, without mincing words. Close on its heels came *Invasion,* by Leonid Leonov, a noted prose-writer and dramatist. A scholar of human nature, Leonov offered profound character portrayals and traced subtle changes in people whom the war had caught unawares. Just as with any psychologically penetrating work, the play was open to several interpretations. Some directors concentrated on the embittered young character who had just been released from prison and felt at a loss. They pedantically traced his path through all his sufferings, which were aggravated by a lack of understanding by others. In the

finale he died as a guerilla. Other directors focussed their attention on the destiny of the young man's family, an old one of Russian intellectuals, stressing their moral integrity and real patriotism without a touch of ostentation. Each performance gave the assurance that every honest Russian, however difficult his circumstances, would find strength to overcome the trials and join the common fight against the nazis.

A third famous play of the time was *The Russians*, by Konstantin Simonov, a very popular poet and dramatist. It showed the soldier and his feats against the background of the war. The play was largely an effort to disprove idyllic conceptions of the war. The real war in it was terribly hard, dirty and exhausting. But despite all hardships the people felt a sacred urge to do their part, which they performed on an unprecedented scale.

The years of war developed a keen interest in Russian history, rich in inspiring analogies. Russia had experienced many aggressions and always emerged victorious. That instilled optimism and stimulated patriotic feelings. The number of historical plays in the theatre reached its peak in those years. The material was former wars or biographies of great leaders of the army or navy, such as Suvorov, Kutuzov, Bagration, Ushakov or Nakhimov.

Naturally, the Great Patriotic War itself was the foremost subject for the theatres and playwrights. A correspondent for a Stalingrad army newspaper, Yuri Chepurin, wrote about Sergeant Pavlov, who, with a handful of sol-

diers, put up a long resistance, holding a house on the Stalingrad front. The house has since been converted into a museum and is a monument to war gallantry. Chepurin later modified his story into a play called *Men of Stalingrad.* Such plays were numerous in the war years. Written in the heat of events, they offer an authentic picture of those grim but epic years.

The victory over the nazis, which the Soviet Union celebrated on May 9, 1945, had been won by the common effort of its army and people. The theatre made an effective contribution to the national cause.

* * *

A few words now about the artistic achievements of non-Russian peoples in Soviet times.

Soon after the Great October Socialist Revolution the nation launched a giant effort to raise the overall standards of education and culture. Illiteracy was attacked energetically, written languages were created for the peoples without them, and new schools, from primary to higher, mushroomed.

An important role in that national campaign was assigned to the theatre. The Soviet Union unites over 60 indigenous nationalities. If the reader had the gift of omnipresence he could attend all Soviet theatres in one night. But he would also have to be super-polyglot to understand the more than 40 languages involved.

By far not all the peoples of Russia had their own theatres before the revolution. The Russians, Armenians, Georgians and the Baltic

peoples had advanced theatrical cultures, while many peoples, even though large numerically, had none. There were no theatres at all in Central Asia, the Moslem North or East Caucasus, the Volga region or Siberia. Today every Union and Autonomous Republic has its own theatres, playwrights and actors.

With ready political and material support from the government, theatres have been built by the Kazakhs, Uigurs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kirghiz, Turkmens, Azerbaijanians, Abkhazians, Kumyks, Avars, Lezghins, Laks, Darghins, Komis, Udmurts, Tatars, Maris, Bashkirs, Chuvashes, Chechens, Yakuts, Buryats, Tuvas, Osetians, Ingushes, Kabardins and Kalmyks — peoples of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Volga and Ural regions, the North and Siberia.

The main difficulty lay not in having to erect buildings or make investments for organisational purposes, but in training actors, directors and set designers. Theatrical schools of Moscow, Leningrad and Tbilisi trained those who were the first to bring this art within the reach of their peoples.

The organisational difficulties were aggravated by strong religious prejudices against secular spectacles. Islam forbade participation in theatricals under fear of severe punishment and condemned visits to public shows as sinful. The pioneer actors frequently experienced open hostility of the clergy and the inimical class elements that supported the old regime. Once the Kumyk theatre played in a mountain village. The subject was the forcible marriage of a girl to a rich man. The actors recall: "*At first the*

show went rather smoothly. But at the beginning of Act 3 the audience (we were playing in a school yard) began to stir and we heard shouts and scolding; the tension kept building up. A man with a black beard arrogantly tore off the line all the lanterns that illuminated the stage, so we remained in complete darkness.

A group of kulaks and our partisans were locked in a fierce argument, it turned out. We heard cries of: 'Ah, you hate to see your tricks exposed!' Imprecations were hurled at us and, still worse, sticks and stones came flying at the stage. Some people turned on us under the cover of darkness. It was difficult to make either head or tail of this tumult but we felt that we had protectors. By their voices we recognized workers of the rural Soviet and young Komsomols. The performance came to an abrupt stop. Many of our actors were severely wounded that night."

However, the theatre soon became part of the fabric of the peoples' life. Culturally, every nation and nationality of the Soviet Union has been advancing at an unprecedented pace since 1917. The upsurge of the theatre was part of the broader cultural and educational one. Within a historically brief time many peoples covered the distance from feudalism, some even from the primitive clan system, to socialist production and the socialist way of life.

The theatres were a potent factor in cultural advancement and the state listed them as a prime necessity. Theatres were set up by large nationalities as well as small, the names of the latter of which are hardly known abroad.

Daghestan, an Autonomous Republic in the

East Caucasus, with a population of a little over a million, has six theatres playing in different languages. It is a uniquely multilingual country. Scholars to this day are undecided as to how many languages exactly are spoken in Daghestan, setting the number at about thirty. The population of some villages speak a language or a dialect which even a neighbouring village does not understand. Daghestan has a press-and-radio service in seven languages. Makhachkala, the capital city, has Russian and Kumyk theatres. There is a Lezghin playhouse in Derbent, on the Caspian Sea, and an Avar one in Buinaksk, in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. Deep in the mountains there are Lak and Darghin theatres in the small towns of Kumukh and Izberbash. The numbers of Lezghins, Kumyks, Avars, Laks and Darghins range between 60,000 and 80,000.

The theatres have permanent premises and perform as well in villages and even remote pastures to which livestock are driven from the mountains in winter. These are real theatres for the people and all have high professional standards. All troupes except one are made up of college-educated actors, some of outstanding talent. The star of the Kumyk theatre, Baryat Muradova, is, according to many experts, one of the Soviet Union's top ten actresses. Vasily Tkhapsayev of North Osetia amazed Muscovites as Othello and King Lear.

In building and supporting theatres of large and small nationalities the Soviet state and its Communist Party proceeded from the Leninist nationalities' policy of granting complete econo-

mic, political and cultural equality to all peoples.

Since their very inception the Soviet theatres have been rendering service to the people. They placed the interests of the people above all else and helped them to build a new life. By the plays done in the past five decades the entire history of the Soviet people could be traced, with their difficulties and successes. Many of the plays reveal the glaring differences between past and present.

The rapid popularisation of the art of the theatre in places where it had never existed before is explained by the fact that theatrical companies, while assuming European forms, remain true to the aesthetic and folkloric traditions of the peoples. Their national distinctiveness and tenor of life are strictly retained.

True enough, some theatres once laid too much emphasis upon classics that failed to reach some audiences, since the national make-up of one people differed from that of another. Olga Pyzhova, a well-known actress and professor at a theatrical college, who has trained many acting troupes in non-Russian theatres, relates an incident in which a company of an eastern republic staged *Without Dowry,* by Ostrovsky. The audience found it difficult to grasp the conflict, for their custom was to pay for the bride whereas the old Russian custom was to take the bride with a dowry.

But that was long ago. Now general cultural progress and the reciprocal enrichment of national cultures have eliminated such cases. Russian and world classics are now widely pro-

duced in theatres of non-Russian republics, while plays by their authors are seen in Russian playhouses.

The new dramatic culture, as compared with the old, is largely of a synthetic nature, combining elements of drama, music and dance, which corresponds to the popularity of music and dance among the people. Each genre is developing. Many republics have their own opera-and-ballet theatres.

Rich folklore has been drawn upon, which lent the new theatrical culture a national aesthetic colouring; the theatres have used as well cultural, literary and artistic values of the past. Translation services have placed within the reach of peoples the literary wealth of neighbouring and distant nations. We have always assumed that the new socialist culture could make progress only by assimilating all the wealth which mankind has been building through the centuries and we have striven to live up to this assumption. Cultural accomplishments, which we have every right to be proud of, are partly due to the fact that, far from opposing the new culture to the old, we have believed in the continuity of the democratic tradition.

Within a comparatively short time the non-Russian republics have built stable theatrical traditions and reared excellent actors and directors capable of representing Soviet art internationally.

The revolution renewed old theatrical cultures, which had taken shape in the face of autocracy and national oppression. Despite all the barriers which the autocracy placed in the way

of the Ukrainian theatre it rose to artistic summits, created dramatic classics and could boast of a galaxy of excellent actors, such as world-famous Maria Zankovetskaya. Freedom immediately unfettered the creative powers of the Ukrainians. New theatres and educational institutions sprang up. Mikitenko, Kulish, Kocherga and other playwrights published interesting dramas. Later plays by Korneichuk, now a prominent Soviet dramatist, were done.

An original, if controversial, phenomenon on the Ukrainian theatrical scene was the Berezil Theatre, founded in 1922 in Kharkov by Les Kurbas, an outstanding director and actor. He resolutely broke with the everyday forms of the theatre (apparently going too far) and looked for new patterns and plasticity of presentation. Kurbas gathered around him the cream of the Ukrainian theatre world for many years. Among his fellow-actors were such inimitable personalities as Amvrosy Buchma and Natalia Uzhvy. The Ukrainian theatre has been markedly influenced by the work of Kurbas, but has not been confined to his style and ideas. Today it is distinctive for true innovation and a keen feeling for the new, as well as for profound respect for classical traditions.

The leading name in the Georgian theatre in the years following 1917 was Konstantin Mardzhanishvili. Before the Revolution that remarkable director worked with the troupe of the Moscow Art and other Russian companies. In Kiev Mardzhanishvili directed Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* in 1919. For ideological emphasis, brightness of colours and spirit the work is

rated as one of the first truly revolutionary productions. Back in Georgia, Mardzhanishvili set up a theatre which rapidly gained popularity and recognition. He fostered a whole galaxy of excellent actors who became life-long proponents of their teacher's views, including Ushangi Chkheidze, Akaky Khorava and Veriko Andzhaparidze. Mardzhanishvili guided Sandro Akhmeteli, the director who enriched the Georgian theatre with a new approach to material. The teacher and the pupil dramatically drifted apart. Each directed his own troupe, competing creatively. The companies founded what are now the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and the Mardzhanishvili Theatre. Both strive to fuse Georgian elements with contemporary forms.

The USSR attaches much importance to tours, which acquaint audiences of one republic with the attainments of another. Every year many companies tour Moscow, the capitals of the non-Russian republics, and other cities and villages. In the past two years many more troupes from other Soviet Republics have performed at Moscow's Kremlin Theatre, which is at the disposal of touring companies.

Recently Moscow has played host to theatres from Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, Vladivostok, Tbilisi, the Estonian university centre of Tartu and the Russian city of Kostroma. They put on mostly contemporary plays and world classics. A theatre of Kirghizia brought to Moscow *King Lear* and the Tartu Theatre did *Coriolanus*.

The non-Russian republics have several theatres each. The capital of Kirghizia, Frunze, has four, including an opera-and-ballet company.

Kirghizia has other theatres in Naryn and Osh, regional centres. Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, can boast of six theatres, and the regional centres have another fifteen.

An effective way to mutual enrichment is the staging of dramas of other nationalities. The exchange is stimulated by regular festivals and tours. The government has organised a service for translation and interpretation from the languages of the Soviet peoples and foreign languages.

The general formula epitomising the relationship of the national and the universal in Soviet art reads: "Art is national in form and socialist in content."

The theatres strive for closeness to the audience and actively propagandise theatrical art, specifically, by performing for rural audiences, to which is attached much importance. Summer or winter, companies travel to the villages, at times braving adverse climate. The cultural mission of the theatre enjoys support from the government, a factor that removes commercial considerations and enlarges the geographic boundaries of the art to include remote areas.

Theatrical Education

The Soviet Union annually turns out vast numbers of actors, directors and other theatrical workers. Two types of actor-training institutions have developed: actors' departments of theatrical colleges, and studios attached to theatres. Moscow has three such studios (they enjoy equal status and have the same curriculum as the col-

lege actors' department) at the Maly, Art and Vakhtangov Theatres. Other theatres can also, if they wish, train groups of young actors. Recently a class graduated at the Mossoviet Theatre and another class at the Sovremennik (Contemporary) Theatre. The Central Children's Theatre has a studio too. The oldest theatrical school of Moscow is the Lunacharsky State Institute for Theatrical Art, consisting of departments for actors, stage directors, ballet-masters and other theatre experts. The actors' department trains dramatic, musical comedy and operetta actors. The directors' department has a section for opera directors. The ballet-masters' department has one for rehearsing instructors. The theatre experts' department trains historians, journalists and officials.

The aura of romance associated with the profession, which appeals most strongly to youth, and the public respect it commands, attract vast numbers of applicants. Naturally, many entrants overestimate their aptitudes. The graduates, whether of college or studio, are immediately offered work. Young actors are in great demand, so to choose the job one wants is no problem. Needless to say, this applies to stage directors too. The profession is as rare as the talent it requires.

Actors study four years and directors five. The curriculum provides for thorough grounding in general subjects. Actors complete their training by playing in graduation performances for the public in the college training theatre or the halls of the studios. The graduate director stages a performance in a professional theatre. The

instructors are noted actors and directors of Moscow theatres. The curriculum ensures the teaching of the Stanislavsky system.

There are other theatrical colleges in Leningrad, Kharkov, Vladivostok and the capitals of the Union Republics. Some form part of larger educational institutions incorporating conservatoires. Every year the colleges or studios turn out groups of actors for theatres of smaller nationalities. In the early postwar years the Moscow and Leningrad colleges trained actors for many Union Republics. Now each of them has its own system of theatrical education so this is no longer needed.

After the War

In 1945 the nation set about to adjust its economy to peaceful needs. Within a very short time it healed the monstrous wounds of the war, rehabilitating ravaged cities and villages and building new ones.

That was a demanding time for Soviet art. It had to concern itself with conflicts in life, to grasp and interpret problems that arose in the wake of the devastation. Understandably, military themes were fresh in the minds of theatre people. The war remained a constant subject for social reflections and called for extensive scholarly research and artistic presentation.

That period in Soviet theatre history was marked by a number of outstanding works dedicated to the war. The new element was a closer consideration of the individual, mostly the

soldier, in the terribly involved circumstances of the war. The drama and the theatre disclosed sources for the massive wartime heroism of the people. The Art Theatre ran *The Victors*, by Boris Chirskov, a play about the battle of Stalingrad, the turning point of the war. The Maly gained popularity with *For Those at Sea*, by Boris Lavrenyov, which underscored that the heroism of the masses is the sum-total of that of individuals brought up in the lofty tradition of patriotism.

Another popular play of the time was *Old Friends* by Leonid Malyugin, who was then better known as a first-class dramatic critic. The Moscow Yermolova Theatre did an excellent job on that lyrical drama about teenagers who were to display their qualities during the war.

Other successful productions in the same vein included *Fairy-Tale About the Truth*, by Margarita Aliger, *Fellow-Travellers*, by Vera Panova, *Makar Dubrava* by Korneichuk in the Kiev Ivan Franko Theatre, and *Konstantin Zaslonov*, by Arkady Movzon at the Yanka Kupala Theatre of Minsk, Byelorussia.

Among these productions—different in scenic manner and ranging from *Makar Dubrava*, a play about everyday life in which the great Ukrainian actor, Amvrosy Buchma, created a most impressive character, to the poetic *Fairy-Tale About the Truth*—a special place belongs to the work of the late Nikolai Okhlopkov, who staged his own dramatisation of *The Young Guard*, a novel by Alexander Fadeyev. It was about hero Komsomols who stayed during nazi occupation in the small city of Krasnodon, in the

Donetsk Region. They set up an underground organisation, gallantly fought the enemy and died like heroes. As soon as the novel appeared, its characters became a symbol of the dauntless wartime spirit of Soviet youth, a symbol of their whole-hearted devotion to their country.

A disciple of Meyerhold and director endowed with a great power of scenic imagination, Okhlopkov infused the truth of life into mighty characters and made his dramatisation sound like a tocsin. In his *The Young Guard* the truth of deed and accurate rendering of the everyday element were fused poetically and radiated lofty inspiration. The finale—where Young Guard members formed a semblance of a sculptural group against the background of a red banner gathered in heavy folds — has gone down in the history of Soviet theatre as a vivid example of an artistic interpretation of the heroic.

The Young Guard was played in 1947 and perhaps launched a new stage in the history of searching experiments in the theatre, which was broken up or slowed down by the war. Okhlopkov's effort was an expression of the romantic trend, most effective and essential to the theatre.

The creative urge was temporarily handicapped by a narrow view of the possibilities of realism. It seemed that bright colours, poetic symbols and artistic hyperbolism were a digression from what they thought were the rigorous demands of realism. A hidebound attitude towards the tenets of Stanislavsky, which gained ground in those years, had nothing in common with the teaching bequeathed by the great rebel of the theatre. The short-lived dra-

ma-without-conflict obsession, in view of its barren nature, failed to exert any appreciable effect on the evolution of the theatre or drama.

Okhlopkov's *Young Guard* revealed that new aesthetic powers were germinating in our theatre, that it was ready for a new flight of creation which was to enrich and diversify its expressive potentialities.

Through the war and postwar years, the theatres retained their great interest in the classics. The Maly Theatre effectively revived Ostrovsky's *Wolves and Sheep* and Gorky's *Vassa Zheleznova,* with unforgettable Vera Pashennaya in the title role.

In the Art Theatre Nikolai Khmelyov staged the *Last Sacrifice,* one of the most frequently seen plays by Ostrovsky. It was interpreted as a tragedy of unrequited love, and eliminated any touch of provincial melodrama.

After the war the maturing powers of Soviet theatre culminated in *The Thunderstorm,* socially the most profound play of Ostrovsky, which once shook the theatre world. Itself a fact of social life, it gave occasion for Russian nineteenth-century democratic critics, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, to attack the structure of contemporary society, gripped in the vice of autocracy. "A ray of light in the realm of darkness," was Dobrolyubov's assessment of the protest of Katerina, the heroine of the play, who gave her life to protest the moral standards of Russian society.

Okhlopkov handled that difficult drama in a new way. He discarded what seemed sacred in the drama of Ostrovsky — the faithful rendering

of everyday element and accent on the unusual standards of merchant life, something that had traditionally been given primary importance in stage interpretations of Ostrovsky. Ostrovsky was really a great portrayer of morals and manners, whose works could well serve as a source for a close study of the everyday life of some sections of nineteenth-century society. In the course of years the theatres had canonised this aspect of his writings so that it had gained ascendancy over the essential. Overelaborateness in fidelity to everyday life, in scenery and acting, relegated to the background the wrath and pain of the writer. Okhlopkov rediscovered Ostrovsky as a tragic poet. His *The Thunderstorm* accentuated the tragic tonality of the play and gave it pronounced dynamism, with Kozyreva creating a superb image of Katerina.

The premiere of *The Thunderstorm* inaugurated a new stage in Soviet theatre. Naturally, the urge for innovation was not confined to the romantic and the monumental. It swept the entire theatrical scene.

Nikolai Akimov of Leningrad staged *The Shadows*, by the Russian nineteenth-century satirist, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and *The Case*, a nearly-forgotten play by Sukhovo-Kobylin. Akimov has the keenest sense of irony and grotesquerie of all Russian directors. His gift manifested itself splendidly in these two productions.

In the Maly Theatre Boris Ravenskikh produced *The Power of Darkness* by Leo Tolstoy, which amounted to a rediscovery of a dramatist in the great writer. The director adequately

brought out the essential fortitude which has helped the people of Russia preserve their immortal soul in the face of the terrible oppression of the autocracy, the landlords and the capitalists. Featuring Igor Ilyinsky as Akim and Mikhail Zharov as Mitrich, the play is rich in superb acting and has been running to this day.

In 1956 the Art Theatre staged Pogodin's *Kremlin Chimes* and *The Third, Pathétique*—plays of the revolution and Lenin. Both vividly manifested the psychological subtlety of the Art Theatre's style of acting, something that its company always reveals in interpreting drama of a high literary level. Problems of the revolution and the intellectuals in *Kremlin Chimes* and the unity of the Communist Party and people, the lofty difficult responsibility of the Party and its leader in *The Third, Pathétique*, were presented against the broad background of the revolution and the years which followed. The two plays had a multitude of subjects and motifs, like symphonies. For his interpretation of the role of Lenin, Boris Smirnov won the Lenin Prize, the top government award.

In those years the Art Theatre produced *Golden Carriage* by Leonov, full of involved moral issues and incisive psychological penetration.

In 1956 the Soviet Communist Party held its 20th Congress, which ushered in a new social and political era and had a pervasive and beneficial effect on Soviet life. The Congress restored the Leninist standards of social life, breaches of which had affected the development of literature and art.

In Moscow the delegates to the Congress watched a new production of *The Optimistic Tragedy*, once brilliantly staged by Tairov at the Moscow Kamerny. That was the work of the Leningrad Bolshoi Drama Theatre under Georgy Tovstonogov, its chief director and a leading personality in the theatre. Tovstonogov developed a basically new approach to the play, to make it sound like a concentration of Vishnevsky's life-long contribution to drama, in which he is the best portrayer of mass revolutionary movements. The crowd scenes were staggering, without detracting from the characterisation of the main personages — the woman Commissar, a Communist, and the anarchist Ringleader. Their characters were sculpted in bold relief and had an amazing power of expression. Not individual heroes but the masses were shown grasping the truth of the revolution. The victory of the Commissar's communist ideology was rendered with graphic cogency. The production was a milestone in contemporary theatre history, as a concentration of many scenic quests that opened up prospects for more.

The directors whose works have been discussed represent the mature generation. Theatrical flowering has been advancing many new names. The 50s gave the theatre a series of talented directors whose work brought out new features of theatrical culture.

The list opens with Oleg Yefremov, the founder of the Moscow Theatre Sovremennik.

Yefremov was trained at the Art Theatre School, worked with the Central Children's Theatre and has appeared in films and plays. He

has brought together a group of young actors, mostly alumni of the same school, and late at night, after rehearsals and performances, they worked on Victor Rozov's *Ever Living*. The very choice of the play revealed a measure of independence, which many thought audacious; it had already had a run in many theatres and been made into a film, the *Cranes Are Flying*, which was a world-wide success and won the Golden Palm Branch at the 11th Cannes Film Festival. To stage the play at all after that seemed tantamount either to a wish to challenge or to display boldness and independence of judgment.

The company, which was still in the making, chose that particular play to declare their civic and aesthetic credo. In some ways the choice resembled the history of Chekhov's *Seagull*, which the Art Theatre took up in 1898 despite and contrary to the abysmal failure of the play at the St. Petersburg Alexandrinsky Theatre. Both the new Art Theatre company and the budding Sovremennik troupe, at different times needed success, and success of a very definite nature.

The rehearsals completed, the cast (they were pressed for time) staged the production late at night in the tiny hall of the Art Theatre School. The new theatre made its appearance. Two years ago the company revived *Ever Living* and have been doing it with success. Played to mark the 20th anniversary of the victory over nazi Germany, it created full rapport between the audience and cast, a mutual, elevating sorrow over the death of fallen heroes and an up-

lifting joy at the thought that they would never die in the memory of people.

The company's choice of the first author was quite understandable. Rozov is now a leading playwright. *Ever Living* was his first major success though not his dramatic debut. Rozov's manner of writing was largely new. More precisely, it had elements of the traditional and of the modern. He was and remains a typical Russian playwright, with a keen interest in ordinary people's motivations in everyday life. In a style inspired by classic traditions Rozov has brilliantly captured the mood of the contemporary young generation which accorded with the Sovremennik programme of portraying the youth, their views and aspirations.

At a time when many critics considered the Stanislavsky system hopelessly compromised by insipid hangers-on, Sovremennik openly declared its adherence to this method. The theatre abides by Stanislavsky's tenet proving thereby that this legacy lives on and bears fruit. Yefremov's company applies it to present-day social requirements depicting aspects of social life of the past decade. This has earned the company the regard of the public.

Time is flying fast. In 1966 Sovremennik marked its 10th birthday. It has built up a large repertoire and nursed a group of excellent stage and screen actors. Some productions were weak but that does not mar their impressive total. Oleg Yefremov is directing a new and excellent theatre.

The same years brought into prominence the present chief stage director of the Maly Theatre,

Yevgeny Simonov, son of the illustrious Ruben Simonov. Yevgeny Simonov first went to the Vakhtangov Theatre School and began his directing activities under his father. The early experiments of the young director were modest but bore the stamp of originality. Talented people usually have a short period of apprenticeship. That was the case with Yevgeny Simonov. *Minor Tragedies* by Pushkin, *City at Dawn,* and *It Happened in Irkutsk,* by Arbuzov (there is an affinity between the two men, Simonov has staged nearly all of later Arbuzov's plays) made Simonov a rising star in the theatre world.

The Vakhtangov Theatre was then living through another period of upsurge—largely a result of the efforts of young Simonov. The Vakhtangov company is one of the few in which the traditions of its founder have survived, though he died long ago. His talented pupils have remained true to their master's principles, which they have kept as effective, and at times made more effective, than they were in Vakhtangov's lifetime through their own steadily progressing skills.

Yevgeny Simonov grasped with amazing quickness the essence of free improvisation, moulded into an exquisite but clear form which makes the art of the Vakhtangov Theatre unique. He could find and justify unexpected scenic solutions, boldly relying on the unusual technique of the actors. Tragedies, dramas and variety shows equally enthused him and brought him equal success. His searching efforts involved difficulties and sometimes the bitterness of setbacks. He works for a theatrical style that would give

a clue to rendering the inspiration of his time, to a theatrical equivalent for the heroic. Twice his effort was rewarded with true splendour—in *City at Dawn,* a play about the Komsomols who, under very difficult conditions, built the new Far Eastern city of Komsomolsk, and in *It Happened in Irkutsk,* boldly posing and solving moral problems of today.

These productions bring out the distinctive style of the Vakhtangov troupe, its accomplished form and particularly festive spirit. Even the most serious piece leaves the spectators with the impression that the actors want to show them, along with the play itself, their own stagecraft, certainty, lightness and ease of action. These productions are vital to the history of the Soviet theatre of those years.

Throughout these years the Vakhtangov Theatre has been directed by Ruben Simonov, himself a remarkable actor, with scores of roles and productions to his credit. The most recent include *The Cavalry Army,* the first experience in staging the brilliant prose of Isaac Babel. Ruben Simonov has developed a company of brilliant actors, including Yulia Borisova, Mikhail Ulianov, Yuri Yakovlev, Nikolai Gritsenko and Galina and Larisa Pashkovas. He revived magnificently the old Vakhtangov version of *Turandot.* The Lenin Prize, which went to him in 1967, crowns a half-century of his theatrical work.

In the early 50s began the directing career of Anatoly Efros, now head of the Moscow Drama Theatre in Malaya Bronnaya Street. For a long time he directed the Central Children's Theatre,

which, under his guidance staged Rozov's *Good Luck, In Search of Happiness* and *Before Supper*. Efros produced *Boris Godunov* by Pushkin, *Marriage* by Gogol, and other Russian classics and Soviet plays. Later, with the company of the Leninsky Komsomol Theatre, he staged Chekhov's *Seagull*, which caused much controversy.

A disciple of Alexei Popov and Maria Knebel, Efros has been schooled in the tradition of Stanislavsky, whose pupils were his teachers. He has a rare gift of making actors act as naturally as they would in ordinary life, and without any inner tension in an atmosphere devoid of all constraint. Efros sacrifices histrionic brilliancy to achieve verisimilitude and life-like portrayal. Efros' style is distinct from, say, that of Sovremennik, which is close to him in some ways and in which he produced plays, in being more graphic and having more freedom in using conventional elements.

In the past three years critics and audiences have been magnetised by what is known as the Taganka Theatre (previously the Drama and Comedy Theatre) so called because it is situated in Moscow's Taganskaya Square. The creative re-emergence took place as if by the wave of a wand, after a prelude on the small stage of the Shchukin School, where actor Yuri Lyubimov of the Vakhtangov Theatre was staging the graduation production of an acting class. Bertolt Brecht was then all the rage, so Lyubimov produced *The Good Woman of Szechuan*. The work became a hit. An unexpected interpretation, the ardour of young performers (some with major

gifts), a fusion of emotion with outwardly graphic presentation, a turbulent rhythm—all signified the birth of a new and original director of talent. The success was so overwhelming that Lyubimov and his whole class were offered what is now the Taganka Theatre. A recognised actor became a stage director.

The next performance of the new company was *Ten Days that Shook the World,* after the book by the American journalist John Reed, an eye-witness of the Russian Socialist Revolution. The book had drawn appreciation from Lenin.

Properly speaking, it was not a usual stage adaptation, but an original composition based on Reed. The events that preceded the October Revolution, the history of its making and the mood of the masses are rendered through all expressive media possible in theatrical art. Psychological scenes are succeeded by grotesque portrayal of enemies of the revolution. Pantomime symbolises the undying flames of popular struggle and couplets of 1917 are sung in the lobby before the performance. The presentation of events of the Revolution are interspersed with recorded comments of Lenin. The company has many productions to their credit but this remains unsurpassed for its political acumen, ideological clarity, completeness of form and creative novelty.

The genre of artistic recitation, popular in the Soviet theatre, has been brought to a level of poetic performance in *The Antiworlds,* Lyubimov's version of the book by the young poet, Andrei Voznesensky. Coming in its wake was *The Fallen and the Living,* a dramatised collec-

tion of poetry about the past world war. The latest premier of the theatre—*Hear Mayakovsky!*—is a dramatisation of works by the great poet of the Revolution.

Four portraits symbolising the aesthetic attachments of the theatre and sources of Lyubimov's inspiration, hang on the walls of the lobby—portraits of Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Brecht and Meyerhold. The combination might seem eclectic but Lyubimov's methods make no eclecticism felt. Lyubimov has recast the traditions of his predecessors in the crucible of his own highly original talent. The experiments of Lyubimov, who is resurrecting old forms of the propaganda theatre, are interesting and effective.

On a nation-wide scale, many talented original stage directors sprang forth in the 50s. In Estonia Voldemar Panso, founder of the Tallin Youth Theatre, successfully did *Hamlet* and a humorous version of Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days*. In Kazakhstan Azerbai Mambetov heads an academic theatre, in Georgia Mikhail Tumanishvili and Georgy Lordkipanidze, representing two currents, have given a fresh impetus to the theatre.

In Moscow new names include Boris Lvov-Anokhin, who started as a director at the Soviet Army Theatre and now heads the Stanislavsky Drama Theatre. The Moscow Musical Theatre is directed by Lev Mikhailov and the Operetta Theatre by Georgy Ansimov. The generation of stage directors which sprang up in the 50s is playing an important role in the theatre. Of course, not all the talented directors of the new generation have been named. Already a newer generation

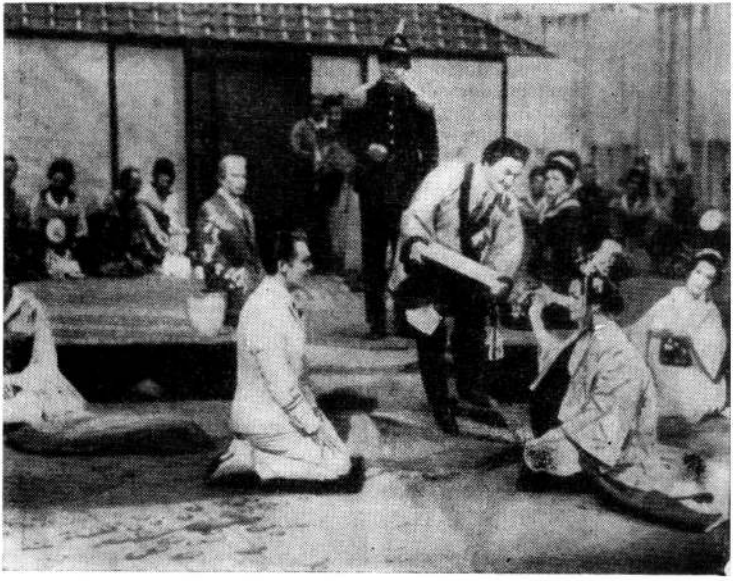
has come upon the scene. Pyotr Kuzenkov, Pyotr Fomenko, Les Tanyuk, Leonid Kheifits, Robert Sturua and others are contributing new subjects, new colours and a new impulse to the theatre.

In large part the originality of the present phase of theatre history is due to the enthusiasm of directors and actors of all generations. Here are recent premieres contributed by directors of the older generation. In Leningrad Georgy Tovstonogov has produced a new and persuasive interpretation of Gorky's *The Petty Bourgeois*. In Moscow Mikhail Kedrov, who has been directing the Art Theatre, staged Gogol's *Inspector-General*. Ruben Simonov made another success with Leonid Zorin's *Warsaw Melodies*, a play on a contemporary subject. The Mossoviet Theatre under Yuri Zavadsky (the first interpreter of Calaf in Vakhtangov's *Turandot)* has produced *The Applause* by Alexander Stein. Leonid Varpakhovsky at the Maly Theatre suggests his own treatment of *The Optimistic Tragedy*. Directors of all generations, united by a common ideological position and a common understanding of the tasks facing the theatre are contributing each his own element to the common cause of progress of the Soviet theatre.

Illustrations

Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov" at the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre, one of the Soviet Union's 37 opera-and-ballet theatres.

"Boris Godunov" at the Bolshoi Theatre. Alexander Vedernikov as Czar Boris parting with his son.

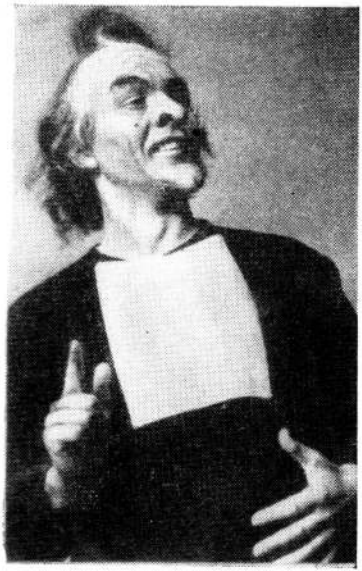


A scene from Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh" at the Bolshoi Theatre with Tamara Milashkina (centre) as Maid Fevronia, the heroine.

A scene from Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" at the Bolshoi Theatre. Front stage are Galina Vishnevskaya as Madame Butterfly and Vladislav Pyavko as Pinkerton.

Artur Eizen as Don Basilio in "The Barber of Seville" at the Bolshoi Theatre.

Verdi's "Don Carlos" at the Bolshoi Theatre. A scene from Act Two.



Benjamin Britten's "Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Bolshoi Theatre. Galina Oleinichenko as Titania.

A scene from "Midsummer Night's Dream".

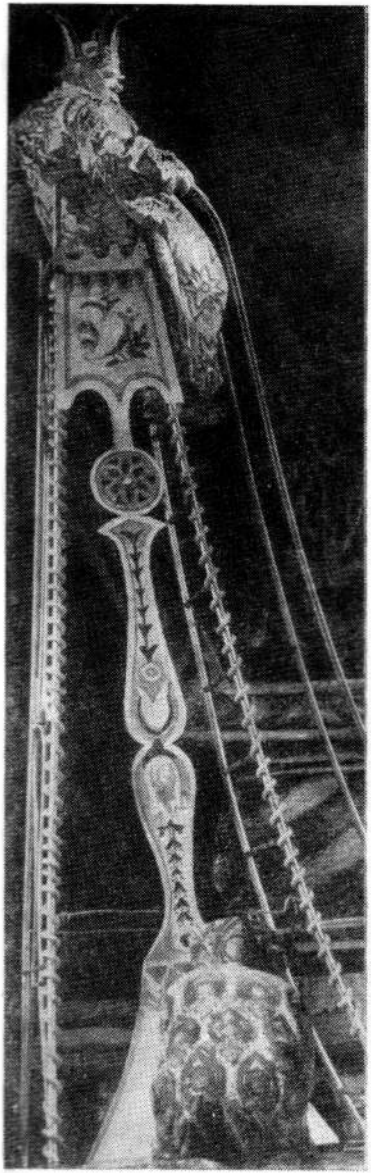
Galina Vishnevskaya in "The Human Voice", by Francis Poulenc, at the Bolshoi Theatre.

A scene from Tchaikovsky's "Queen of Spades" at the Bolshoi Theatre.

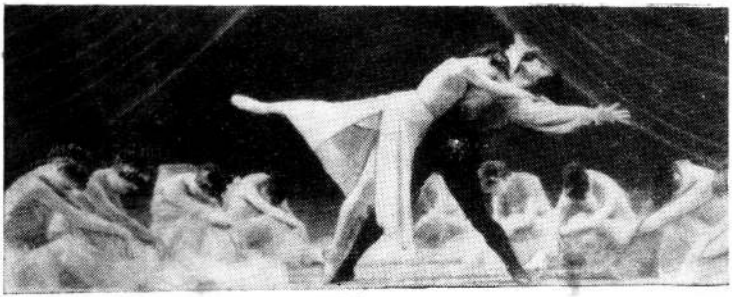
"Stone Flower," a ballet by Prokofiev at the Bolshoi Theatre. A scene with Nina Timofeyeva and Vladimir Levashov.

Act Three of Rodion Shchedrin's ballet "Little Humpbacked Horse."

Yekaterina Maximova in a dance scene in Gounod's "Faust."



Yekaterina Maximova.

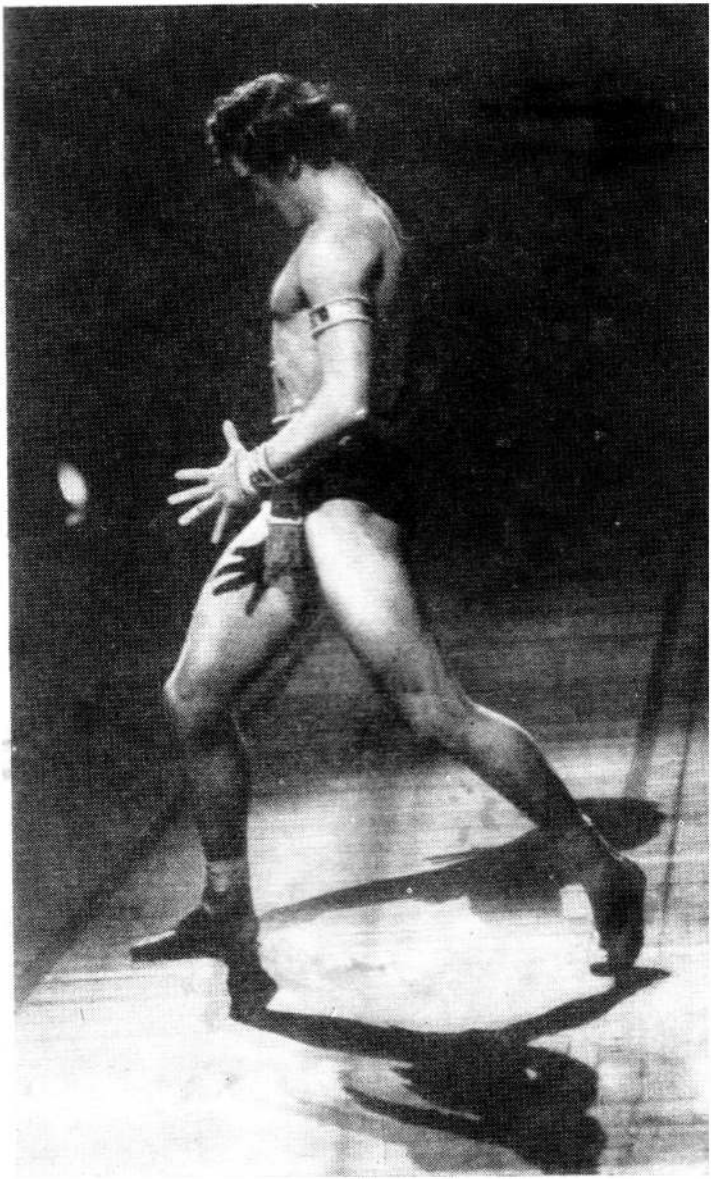


Ravel's "Bolero" at the Bolshoi Theatre. A still from the Soviet film "Bolshoi Ballet."

A scene from Rachmaninov's "Paganini" at the Bolshoi Theatre.

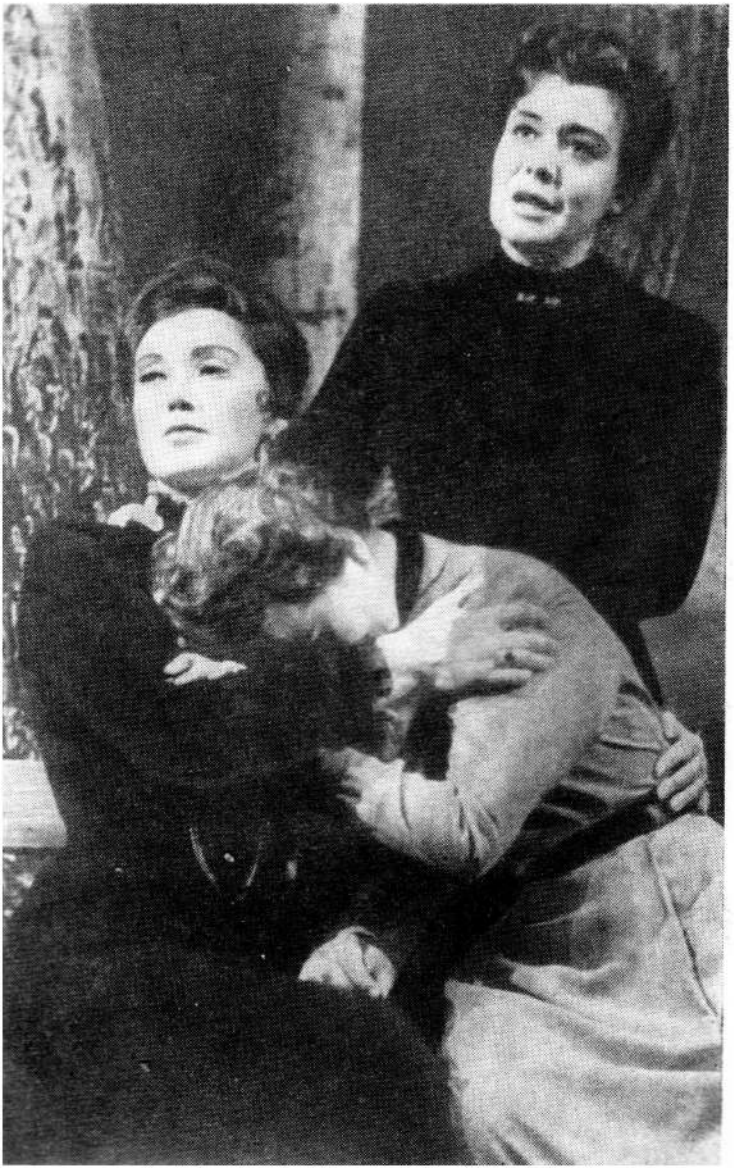
Prokofiev's "Sub-Lieutenant Kizhe" at the Bolshoi Theatre.

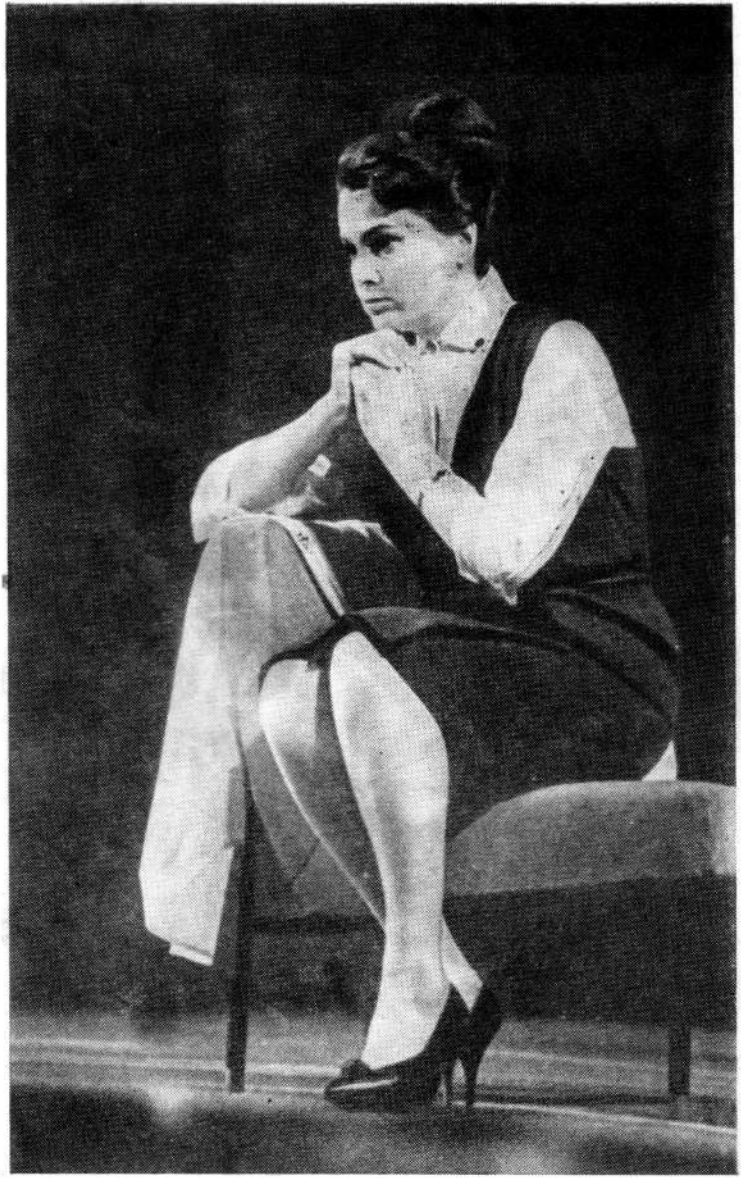
Mikhail Lavrovsky in "Spartacus," a ballet by Aram Khachaturyan, at the Bolshoi Theatre.



Stanislavsky in "Much Ado about Nothing" 1897.

Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard" and "Three Sisters" at the Moscow Art Theatre, and Yevgheny Shvarts' "The Shadow" at the Leningrad Comedy Theatre.

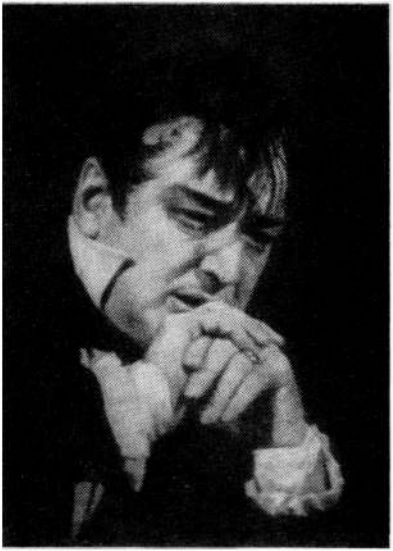




Elina Bistritskaya in a scene from "The Ward" by S. Alyoshin at the Maly Theatre.

A scene from Vsevolod Vishnevsky's "Optimistic Tragedy" at the Maly Theatre.

Henrietta Ryzhkova and Yevgheny Urbansky in "The Modern Tragedy" by Revaz Ebralidze at the Stanislavsky Theatre.



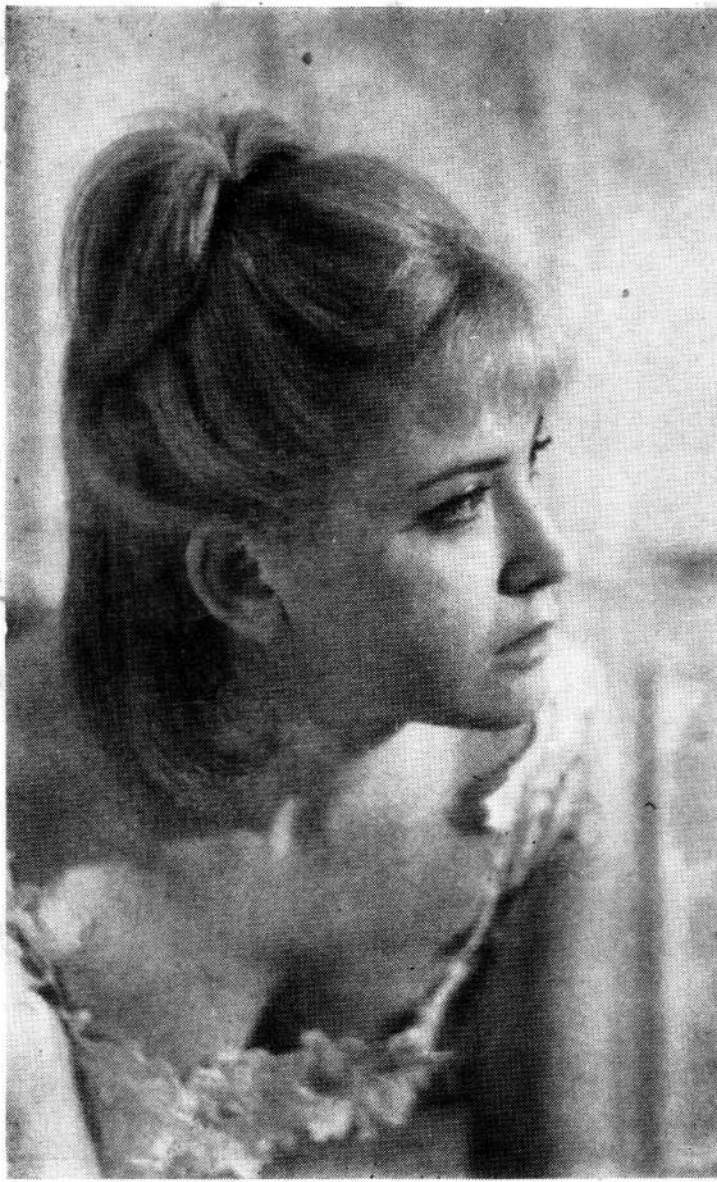
Nikolai Mordvinov as Arbenin in Lermontov's "Masquerade", produced by Yuri Zavadsky at the Mossoviet Theatre.

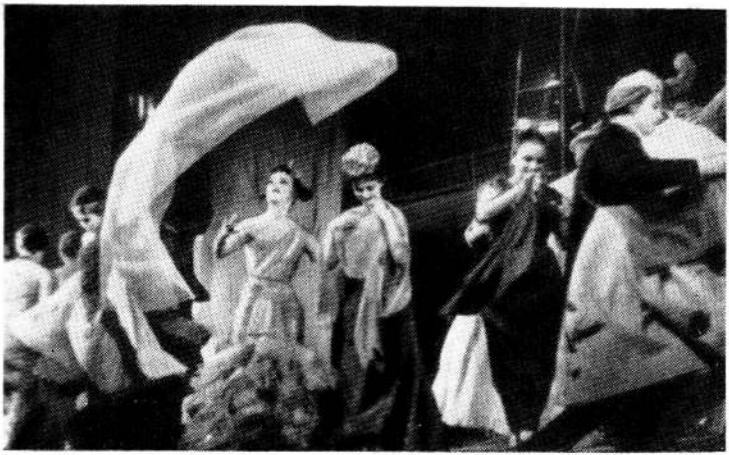
"The Curious Savage" by G. Patrick at the Mossoviet Theatre with Faina Ranevskaya (second from the right) in the title role.

"Madame Sans-Gêne" by Sardou and Moreau at the Mossoviet Theatre.

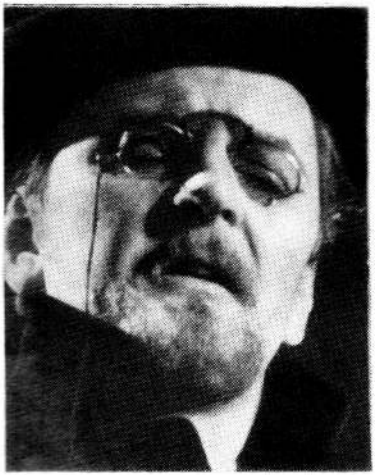
A scene from Dostoyevsky's "My Uncle's Dream" at the Mossoviet Theatre.

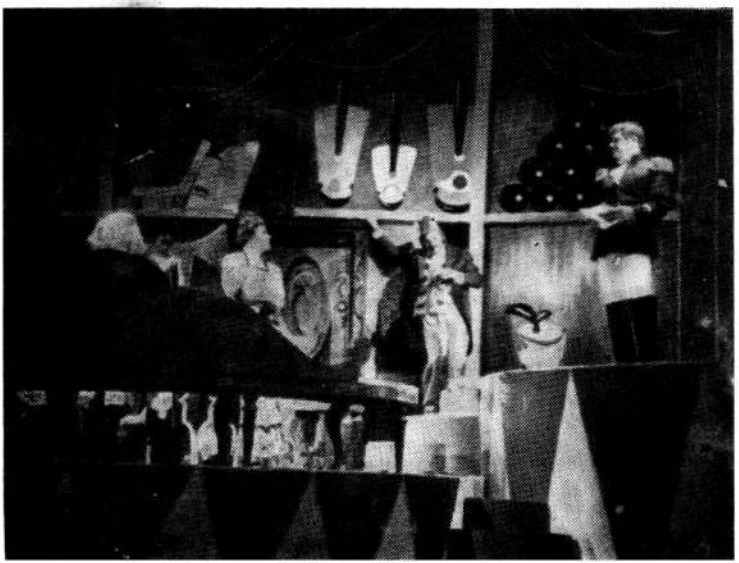
Vladimir Seleznyov and Galina Dashevskaya in "The Wonderful Lady Shoemaker" by F. Garcia Lorca at the Mossoviet Theatre.





Scenes from performances at the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre.





A scene from "Ten Days that Shook the World" at the Moscow Taganka Theatre, a dramatisation based on the epic of the same name by John Reed.

A scene from Act Two of Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man" at the Moscow Pushkin Theatre.

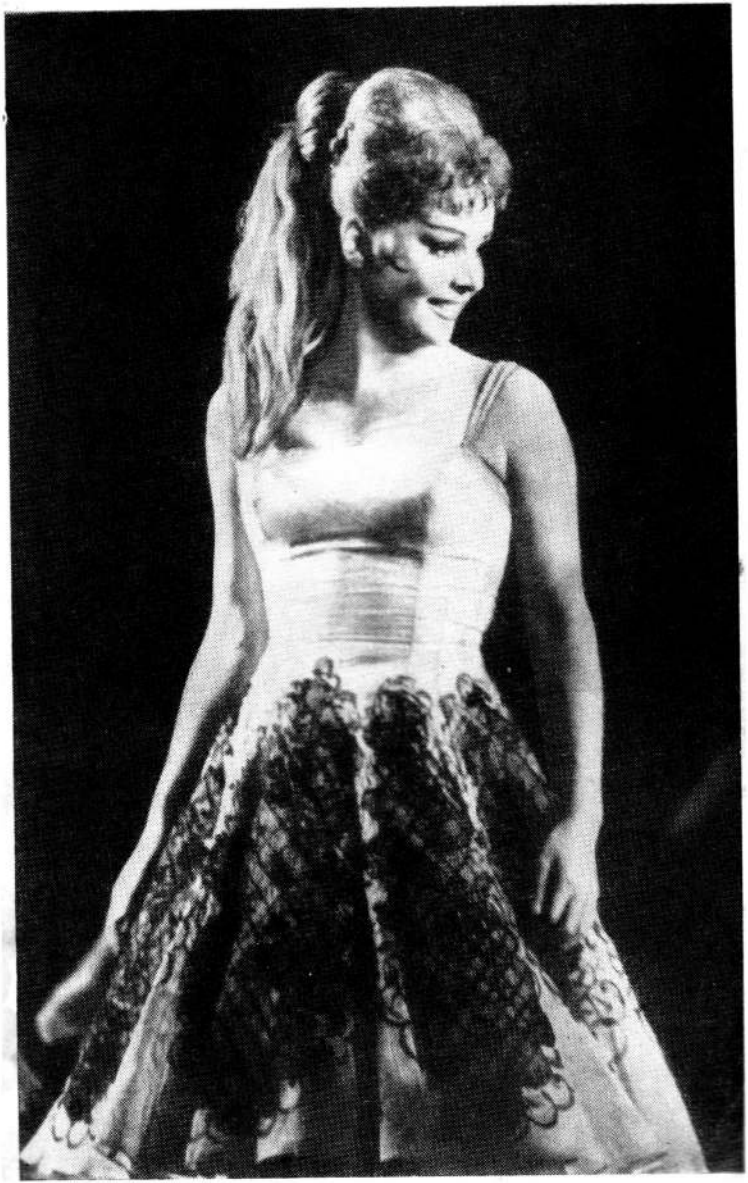
Yasya Antonova of the Drama Theatre of Belgorod, Central Russia, preparing for a performance of "The Dancing Master" by Lope de Vega.

The closing scene in "Hear Mayakovsky!" at the Taganka Theatre.

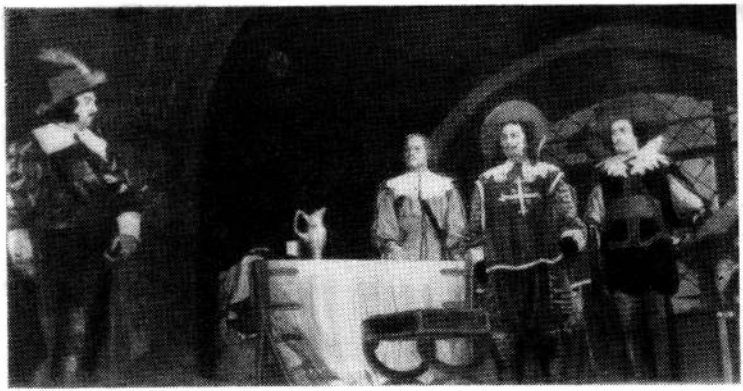
"My Fair Lady" at the Moscow Operetta Theatre. A scene from Act Two.

The bird-and-hunter dance of Yene Huska's "Baroness Lilie" at the Moscow Operetta Theatre.

Antonina Tsygankova as Anita in Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story" at the Moscow Operetta Theatre.



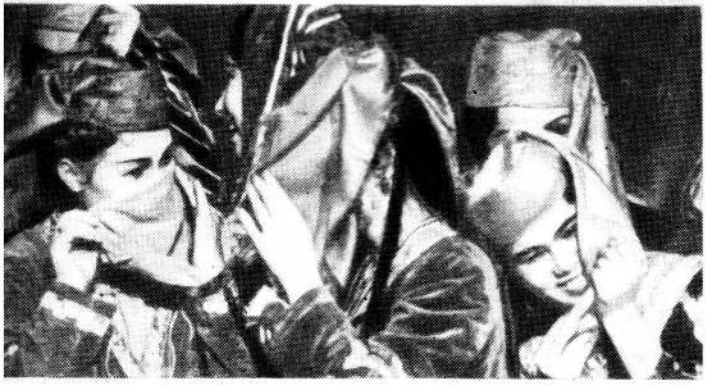
Scenes from performances at the Jan Rainis Theatre (Riga), the Moscow Satire Theatre and the Leningrad Bolshoi Drama Theatre.



A scene from "The Nut and the Rope," a dramatisation of an Indonesian fairy-tale at the Moscow Children's Theatre.

The Central Children's Theatre in Moscow. A scene from "King Matiush I."

A scene from "The Three Musketeers" after Alexander Dumas at the Moscow Young Spectator Theatre.



The Ivan Franko Theatre, Kiev. Svetlana Korkoshko in the title role in Sophocles' "Antigona."

A scene from "The Last Stop" by Erich M. Remarque at the Soviet Army Theatre, Moscow.

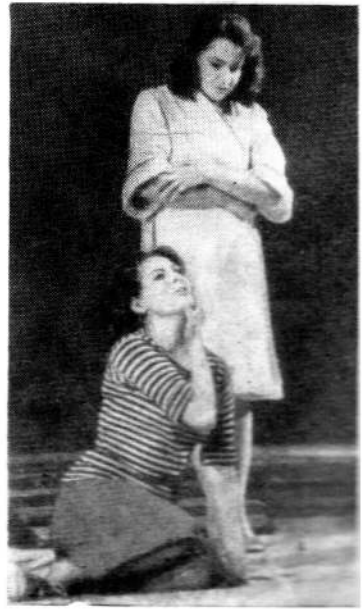
A scene from "Nurkhon," by Kamil Yashen, at the Musical-Drama Theatre of Fergana, Uzbekistan.

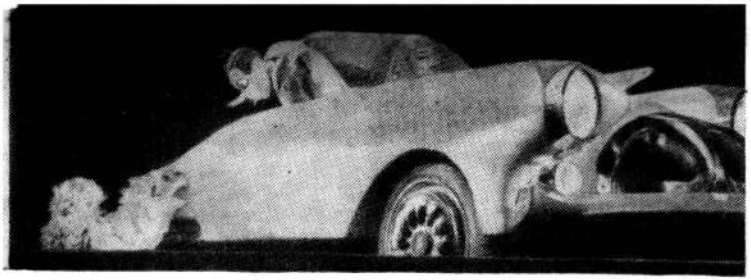
The Moscow Leninsky Komsomol Theatre. A scene from Mikhail Bulgakov's "Moliere" with A. Pelevin in the title role and V. Dughina as Mariette.

A scene from Alexei Arbuzov's "My Poor Marat" at the Moscow Leninsky Komsomol Theatre.

Valentin Gaft and Olga Yakovleva in "104 Pages about Love" by Eduard Radzinsky.

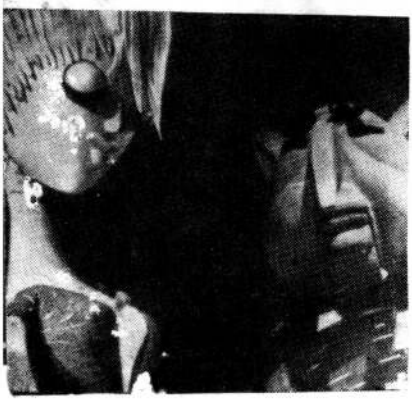
A scene from Alexander Korneichuk's "Page from a Diary" at the Ivan Franko Theatre, Kiev.





The Central Puppet Theatre, Moscow, under Sergei Obraztsov. A scene from "Mine, Only Mine." Play and sets by Boris Tuzlukov.

The choir scene from "An Unusual Concert" at the Central Puppet Theatre.



A scene from Yevgheny Speransky's "Ee—ho—ho" at the Puppet Theatre.

The Stranger in "Mine, Only Mine" at the Puppet Theatre.